

Let me tell you two quick things before I begin so you will know where I'm coming from on this issue. First, I personally find very little worth watching on television and have never really enjoyed electronic games very much, even when I was younger. Second, I would not place myself in the camp of over-reactive worriers about how vulnerable most of our children are to the vast wasteland of screens. So, with my biases stated, here is what I do worry about.

Most families I know, personally and professionally are running about as fast as they possibly can. Running at the "speed of life" according to a friend of mine who has three kids and is also the principal of a suburban high school. Whenever possible, I try to remind parents that they are in control (really) of how busy they allow their families to become and how much they allow the relaxed, intimacy of family life to be encroached upon by volunteer work, sports, lessons and all the other terrific opportunities that compete for our family time.

Four points:

1. Screen time breeds passivity and moodiness in nearly all children. I know this is a sweeping generalization but let me put it out there for you to think about and agree or disagree with as you may.
2. Screen time is directly subtracted from better uses of time. An hour watching television or playing computer or video games of any kind is always of lesser quality than an hour spent connected to a parent, a book, or a project that requires active creative impulses.
3. Even if we don't get hysterical about how casually and inappropriately sex and violence is presented in the media, you wouldn't want to be the person in a debate arguing the position that it is helpful or growth promoting in any way. Even if most children can be exposed to the silly garbage that seems to be the staple of our media without being overly harmed (after all they have us to balance the messages of sex and violence) it is still part of their childhood that is not devoted to more productive uses of time. The bigger issue, therefore, is the lost opportunities, what they are not doing, while they are in front of screens.
4. Most parents are so busy that they tolerate the vast wasteland of screen time for their children so that they can have a bit of time to catch up on their own work or projects. When else will we call our parents, make dinner, catch up with the work we brought home from work, or get the laundry done.

My suggestion would be to ask you to consider what my wife and I decided long ago. No screens (except for the computer being used for homework) on school nights. Limited and supervised use on other days. No electronic games with themes of sex or violence.